

The Fight to Save Our Wetlands

The wetlands are a unique ecosystem found only in certain areas of our country where diverse plants and animals exist. The wetlands are being destroyed by many different sources ultimately leading to the complete loss of this limited area. The wetlands provide not only a home for many animals and plants, but they act as a natural barrier for the many cities in the coastal areas. Though many initiatives have been set in place to stop the rapidly disintegrating coast, if this problem is not controlled, the wetlands could potentially be destroyed forever. The thought of the wetlands being completely erased is quite appalling, and we must all realize that many of the daily actions we take part in are contributing to the destruction of our marshes. The future of the wetlands will not be favorable if people do not take the initiative to stop the destruction of the wetlands.

Many problems facing the wetlands are not merely caused by natural occurrences, but many problems caused by humans are also affecting this area. Problems such as eutrophication, the process by which bodies of water receive excess amounts of nutrients, and the digging of trenches are a few of the many man-made problems facing the wetlands. Eutrophication is having an extremely negative impact on the wetlands. The chemicals and fertilizers many people use on a daily basis are killing the plants in the affected area, leading to the destruction of many marshes (Davis-Wheeler 2). Commercial use of these endangered waterways is also having a significant impact on the wetlands for our coast because companies are destroying the wetlands to use them as routes of travel and trade. The overwhelming numbers of natural disasters in the coastal areas have eroded away the marshes at a much quicker pace than can be handled. Hurricanes such as Katrina and Rita have eroded many marshes in this area, which are not being restored but rather further destroyed ("Standing Ground" 3). To protect the cities in the area near the coast, levees were built to stop flooding. The initiation of levees is causing major problems for the wetlands ("Coastal Landmarks" 3). Flood overtopping and overbank sedimentation, which are necessary for the existence of marshes, are no longer taking place because of the levees (Davis-Wheeler 2-3). Though many may not realize, many decisions we have made to protect our homes and cities are destroying the wetlands along our coast.

Unless we as a nation make a concerted effort to stop the erosion of our wetlands, the effects will be irreversible. One way in which we as a people can stop this erosion is by diverting the rivers ("Coastal Landmarks" 4). River diversions are a long-term solution to our rapidly growing problem. This solution will cause an increase in sediment and a reduction of salinity (Davis-Wheeler 2). The natural flow of our waterways has been disrupted forcing waterways to reroute into many wetlands. This one solution to the problem facing the wetlands can significantly improve the existence of our marshes ("Standing Ground" 2). One national plan instated for the bettering of our wetlands is the Coast 2050 Plan. This is a plan initiated for the benefit of coastal Louisiana. The Coast 2050 Plan was established in order to restore the wetlands along Louisiana's coast, as well as prevent further destruction from occurring. It will increase

the well being of not only the habitat and physical area, but also the people living in the coastal areas of Louisiana. This plan's objectives are to increase the values of the ecosystem, better the living conditions for people living on the coast, for whom the wetlands provide a source of economic growth; and restore the marshes along the Louisiana coast, as well as prevent rapid destruction from occurring even more than what is happening now ("Coast 2050" 1-3). Many steps can be taken to decrease the number of diminishing wetlands on our coast; but it is up to us, the people, to take these steps to the next level by following through with what needs to be accomplished ("Standing Ground" 2).

As one could only imagine, if the wetlands of our coast are not saved soon, the future of the wetlands, as well as the people living in these areas, will be dismal. This extremely unique ecosystem will potentially be lost forever destroying the habitat of the indigenous animals. Without their natural habitat, animals living in this area will fail to thrive resulting in potential loss of animal species in the area. With this drastic loss of habitat, some species of animals living in this area could be at risk for endangerment or even extinction. The economy in the surrounding areas will also be dramatically impacted and will result in a significant downfall in the economy of the local areas. Not only will the people in the wetlands be more susceptible to hurricanes, but they will eventually lose their homes because of the loss of infrastructure in the area. Millions of dollars will be lost because of the scarce jobs available for people living in these areas. Without the fisherman, tourists, and local business owners living in the community, the local economy will suffer greatly ("Unified Vision" 1-3). The effects of the diminishing wetlands are even more severe than one can imagine; and if the proper steps are not taken to prevent these possible outcomes, life as it is now in the wetlands will never be the same.

Our wetlands are suffering in large part because of the careless manner in which we humans treat our environment; unless significant changes are made in the near future, it may soon be too late to save this precious resource. Without this natural barrier to protect our coasts from natural events, including hurricanes and erosion, the protection provided by the wetlands to our coastal communities will be lost, leaving many areas vulnerable to catastrophic events. As stewards of our planet, we humans have an obligation to protect the natural resources that the earth provides. This obligation in no small part includes preservation of the fragile ecosystem that is the wetlands. Unless we make a determined commitment to reverse the current trends, this invaluable natural habitat will be lost forever.

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Third Place Winner

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